

## Western State Address

Good morning to the graduates of 2009, good morning to the families and friends of graduates, those of you who came to see the graduates. I will do something that President Jay Hellmann did at the beginning; extend my own thanks as Governor of the State and citizen who cares about higher education. Thank you for your support of these 258 graduates, the things that you did in their life journey to get them to the place that they are at today. Give one more round of applause to all those people who helped you through, you know who they are.

This day is a miracle, I mean everyday is a little bit of a miracle but to be in Gunnison in 45-50 degree weather and sunshine – it's a little bit of a miracle, right? Sitting behind me is also a miracle – president Jay Hellmann. He had a medical incident in January. You know that your president had a medical incident in January that was really life threatening. He had medical treatment, he had successful medical treatment. And he is just the sign to us that courage and resilience of the human condition. To get out of the car this morning and to see Jay for the first time since he had his incident in January to me was to witness again the miracles of life, things that you'll experience throughout your life. Just give Jay a really big round of applause for everything that he...(applause)

I hope that's not my son with that microphone, that megaphone out there, this could get bad.

I want to extend a thank you to Dr. John Sole who in Jay's absence, President Hellmann's absence was the leader at this school and also I will tell you is one of the renown educators of this state. I put him on a council called the P20 Council, just a lot of different servers in the state of Colorado, thank you John and everything you have done for the state.

I want to thank the staff and faculty. You are people who have committed your lives to professionalize higher education, we say that we talk about it in the abstract, the good news is that on a day like today it's not abstract it's concrete, it's represented by the faces and the lives of the people who sit here, leave here today, go to the next place in life but you are better for it and have changed their station in life because you committed your time, your energy and your entire profession to these people before you, thank you very much.

Two moments of personal privilege. One, we are joined in the audience, somewhere; I am not certain where, by our Attorney General Jon Suthers. He is the Attorney General for the State of Colorado, his niece is here in the graduating class, I just want to welcome him. Jon and I are from different parties but I think we represent the best dialogue. We have been friends since 1993 and although he is a republican and I am a democrat, Jon and I have managed to always be friendly and to always be civil. I actually have a profound respect for him and his public service that he has given to the state and local community in Colorado. So give Jon Suthers a round of applause – where ever he is.

Finally I also want to say that I am here with my family. Two of my four children – Sam and Tally, my wife who attended Western State from 1974 to 1975 for a year and then transferred to University of Northern Colorado because I was going to CSU and because a five hour drive every weekend was a hard thing to carry off. We have a lot of stories. In fact sitting here today I can't remember a time when the sun shone and it was hot beneath a robe. I remember that I could tell the temperature outside by the sound people's feet made crunching the snow as they walked by your room. Anyone who has gone to school here or has lived here knows that you can actually listen to how the snow sounds. I remember this is a place where only hearty people could survive a four-year education. Some of you are so hearty that you could survive five or six years and make it through the day. We appreciate that added heartiness that you brought to your education.

This is a fairly difficult time in the world when you leave here. This is a difficult time in our economy, the worst economy in 75 years. As a country we are still at war on two different fields. And at the same time there are all these important/serious challenges. If you listen to Nicole and listen to what you have as a class done around sustainability and the climate, it's encouraging to me as the Governor because quite frankly those issues, the climate are some of the biggest issues we face in the world and that you will face in your generation. It seems like it is difficult.

I know it is going to be difficult in some respects. I just want to give you a few suggestions from this commencement speech. Suggestions about life that I think work in the downturn and when you are up it works whenever you are down or at the top of your game, these are three suggestions I want you to hold onto. They are fairly easy lessons that I have learned along the way by life experiences.

The first is to be open, be open to the possibility, be absolutely open. Being in a downturn is quite frankly a little liberating because you may not get the job you wanted or go to work at the place you thought or make the salary you wanted but it could be a liberating thing. Like Jay said, I come from a family of 12 kids, I was the 6<sup>th</sup> of 12 children. I put my way through CSU and looked to go to law school, my parents had never been to college, my grandparents had never been to high school. I didn't know what this college thing was like but I went and then onto law school and wanted to be a labor lawyer. I was a construction worker through colleges and I thought instead of being a labor lawyer, I would be a federal prosecutor. It took five years and it was absolutely fantastic and then my wife and I decided to leave. So we moved to Africa. We lived in Zambia and ran a Christian Center for five years. We were missionaries, totally different career path than you might think. We came back and I went back into the field of prosecution and I was there for about two years and then I was appointed to become the district attorney of Denver. My predecessor had left and I had never thought about being in office, never thought about it in high school, college or law school but I was open to it and then while in office I was open to doing something else in elected office because I saw the influence it could have and the direction it would take. Now I am the Governor. I was just open to the position, to be Governor. I really encourage you to be like that. To be really open to the opportunities that life presents.

The second thing I ask you to do is to follow your passions, follow your passion. Jay used the word passion. We talked about how important it was to have a passion. Your passion is not set. It is not something that can't change to another thing. It is okay for that to happen. There is a great writer that once said,

“Don't ask what the world needs, go do the thing that you are really passionate about. What the world needs most are people who are doing the thing they love most.”

I think that is such a great way to think about that. When I was the district attorney and I remain today passionate about our justice system, really passionate about our justice system. I became Governor and that is a whole other set of issues but I remained passionate. As Governor I am passionate about the state, we flew in this morning to Gunnison and my kids said to me, “do you know how lucky you are to fly over the state, to be Governor?” And I think you surrounded by all this natural beauty understand this more than anyone in Colorado. This isn't something you can take for granted. You must permanently protect them. Just an example of where I have found passion being Governor.

Another thing that Jay said and I'll just say it, I am really passionate about education. I said that we are not going to make a 300 million dollar cut to higher education, that's because the reason is there is no amount of money that we spend in this state that has a better return on investments. I came from a place, like I said, where we didn't have a culture of higher education. My entire station in life has changed, my virtue that education, my virtue of being able to come to a door and knock and have it open because I have an education. And in Colorado and hire education, I believe it is the thing in America that can set us apart in the world. If you took the entire world's people, only one out of every 100 would have a college education and yet here in America with all the possibilities we have, investments have to be made on education.

So it is about being open and being passionate. And finally it is about service. We talk about military service, public service, Jon Suthers and myself and your professors are all a part of public service. It doesn't mean you have to be in the military or work for the government. It means you have to have a mind about how you serve fellow human beings. You can be in the private sector and find ways to serve, you can be in a job that might not be in the context of service you might serve in the outside of your community. Alexis \_\_\_\_\_ the French historian, you history majors learned about him – in 1830 he came to America and he found that America can form a democracy and wanted to figure out what was so special and he wanted to take that back to Europe, especially France where he was from. He wanted to figure out the government in France, the type of government they wanted. And he said there is a lot that is special about America. He said the thing that is most distinguished is a thing that he called self-interest well underserved, what we as a country were founded upon – religious freedom, with religious principles that became our civic values. How do we take care of each other? That is one of the civic values that we had early on, how do we take care of each other – self-interest well understood concept – if we act in other people's self interest than we promote it. We are a body of people, a community of people. Whether you talk about the Gunnison body of

people, the Colorado body of people. There will come a day when we will need other people to help us. We as Americans are famous for understanding the concept of service.

When Jeannie and I went to Zambia and worked in the nutrition center, of course we had this notion that we would be in the third world. Children under the age of five were malnourished, under nourished. At the end of the day we were the ones who learned the most, who received the most, who were loved the most. It was about other people – it was about service – you get there by being open, following your passions. God bless and congratulations class of 2009!